

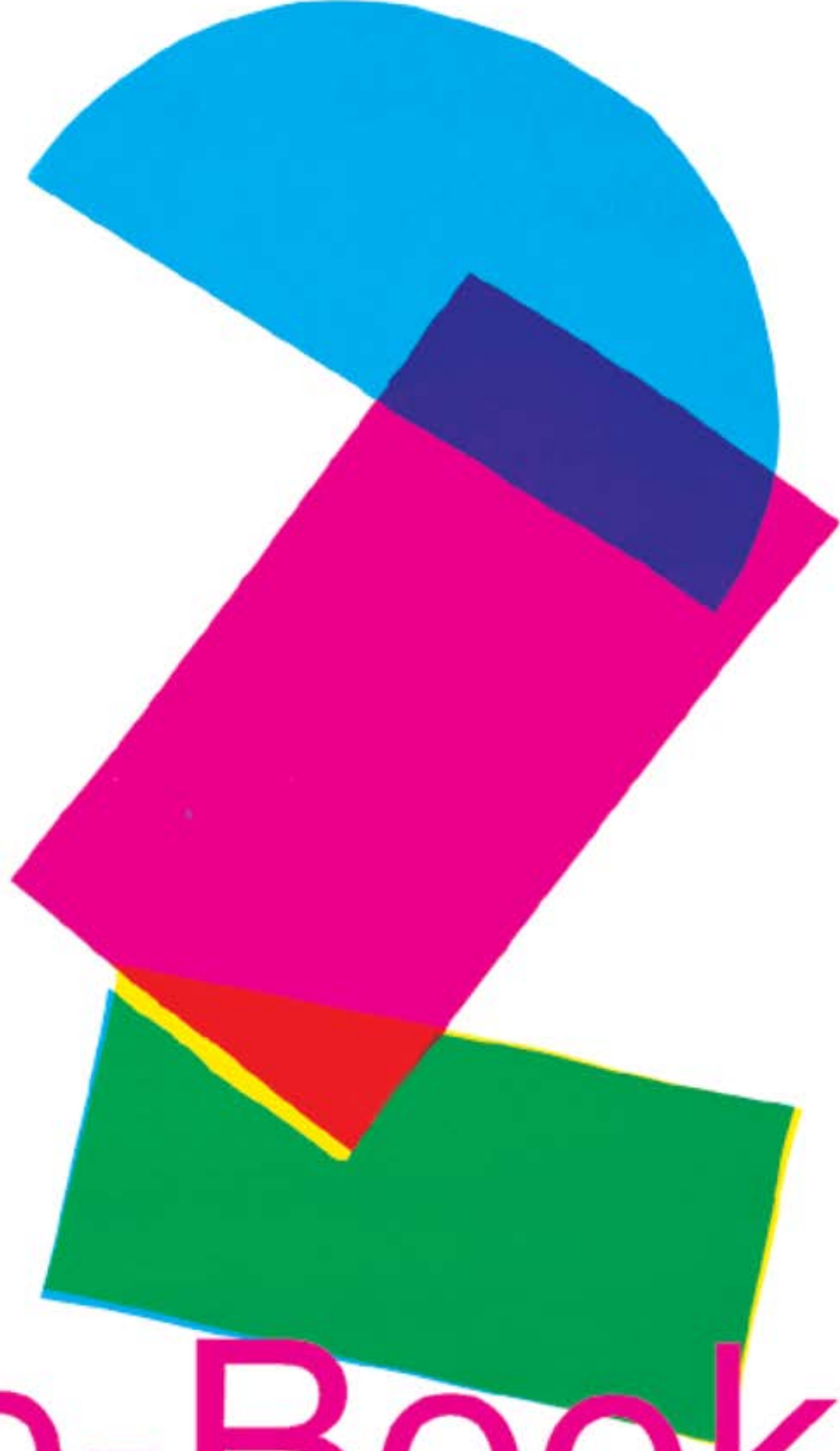
2, 3 e 4 de Abril de 2012
Porto, Portugal

II Encontro Internacional sobre Educação Artística

Acerca da implicação da acção na
construção de narrativas contemporâneas

e-Book

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Os textos que agora se publicam correspondem aos textos reescritos após a sua apresentação no 2º Encontro Internacional sobre Educação Artística (2ei_ea), realizado no Porto, de 2 a 4 de Abril de 2012, pelos respectivos autores. Era objectivo dos organizadores que o 2ei_ea se realizasse num ambiente de partilha de experiências e de debate aberto capaz de construir reflexões críticas decorrentes de cada acção. Partir para um encontro com a vontade de discussão implicava que todos os participantes aceitassem formas alternativas de questionamento que lhes permitissem um descentramento e um deslocamento dos lugares de conforto que cada um, inevitavelmente, vai ocupando.

Terminado o encontro, foi lançado o convite, a cada interveniente, de reescrita do seu texto, tendo em consideração o debate ocorrido e, nomeadamente, as forças que se geraram e que atravessaram o seu pensamento.

Os textos aqui reunidos são, assim, o resultado do novo desafio e respondem à vontade de partilhar, em formato digital, os textos que nos foram chegando. São publicados tal como enviados pelos seus autores, não tendo sido sujeitos a intervenção alguma pela comissão organizadora do 2ei_ea, mesmo do ponto de vista da sua organização gráfica.

Após a publicação deste e.book, dar-se-á continuidade à implicação da acção na construção de narrativas contemporâneas em educação artística, tema que preencheu o 2ei_ea, com uma nova publicação, em livro.

A fundamentação teórica e a preocupação estética são outros aspetos basilares, que aliados ao conhecimento dos materiais e ao domínio técnico, constituem fatores fundamentais para uma criação artística que se pretende interventiva e inovadora.

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WORKING WITH HANDS

Surprised with the common accustomed to the strange

Authors: Atxu Amann, Efi Giannopoulou, Anthi Kosma, Lola Martínez, Katerina Psegiannaki, Tania Ugena

Abstract: This text aims to describe the preparation, process, context and conclusions of an intensive course of ATHENS network, held in the ETSA of Madrid on November 2011. The topic of the course is "Working With Hands". The working group; coming from different fields like arts, architecture and education, the participants; coming from different countries and faculties like architecture, engineering and mathematics, the short lecture time of 30 hours, and the suggestive and provocative exercises, have created a fruitful and of mutual benefits experience. The main objective of the course is using familiar and provoking unfamiliar actions of our hands, which will assist us to comprehend and analyze new explorative approaches. An open issue without a direct utility -taking as a starting point the human body- allows us to deal with items that emphasize similarities and differences and opens space to reflections that persist over time.

Keywords: Hands, Body, Estrangement, Defamiliarization, Atlas, Action, Strangeness, Senses

Complete Text:

“Working With Hands”, is the title of an experience carried out in a winter intensive five day workshop at the School of Architecture of Madrid as part of Advanced Technology High Education Net System (ATHENS). It was thought and completed by a group of people coming from different backgrounds and using “hands” as the common subject.

Introduction

We are accustomed to an academic environment where teachers are the transmitters of a preestablished course material and students are the receptors, giving or receiving lessons in a “facing position”. In this type of transmission, that is usually unidirectional, body barely participates. Apparently it's a mind based procedure. However, as many researchers observe, knowledge is not only a mind matter. The first knowledge is that of the body and yet, in the tradition of scientific knowledge the body became the first epistemological obstacle (Pacheco 2004, 185).

In order to include the knowledge of the body in our learning processes we set as our main aim to consider “hands by themselves”; as independent beings and instruments; as mediums to communicate and produce, know and feel, act and work, love and kill; and finally as objects of a scientific research, observing all of their characteristics - anatomy, functionality and appearance.

In this way, we attempted to make an approach to the matter of study in a both corporal and mental way and of course, in a ludic way. Playful learning includes promoting heuristic and creative work, linking action to pleasure and enlarging our capacity of the environmental perception. By including all sensitive levels we developed the feeling of criticism, promoting intellectual connections and assuming social negotiations. We managed to achieve the highest level of cooperation on teamwork bringing out empathy as the best way to eradicate any kind of inequality that makes us get used to the uncertainty and face situations, thus neutralizing the fear of failure.

Therefore, in order to work with hands, as the study object, we first had to achieve a state of “defamiliarization” or “estrangement” concerning our own body experience. Jean Luc Nancy describes this state speaking about the gesture of the first imager, the person who draw on a cave

"For the first time, he touches the wall not as a support, nor as an obstacle or something to lean on (all of which might equally have left prints, none of which will have counted, will have done this work—at least not until this work has been done), but as a place, if one can touch a place. Only as a place in which to let something of interrupted being, of its estrangement, come about" (Nancy, 1996; 75, 76).

To achieve this kind of "defamiliarization" or "estrangement" like the first painter, we had to act as observers of our own hands and body as well as of our own acts as if it was the first time. Thereby we had to perceive our hands as independent entities, as something out of us, outside of our own body experience. Defamiliarization, as a scientific approach, is based on the consideration that any identity (object, action, place or being) must be placed outside of ourselves in order to be critically known, independently from our daily lives and beliefs.

"For the observer an entity is an entity when he can describe it. To describe is to enumerate the actual or potential interactions and relations of the described entity. Accordingly, the observer can describe an entity only if there is at least one other entity from which he can distinguish it and with which he can observe it to interact or relate. This second entity that serves as a reference for the description can be any entity, but the ultimate reference for any description is the observer himself." (Maturana, 1980; 9)

"Handmade" Experiences

We observed hands either as a whole or regarding at their different parts: fingers, thumbs, fingertips, wrists, palms. There are a considerable amount of studies that connects the progress of human brain with hands. Nevertheless it's difficult for us to consider such an importance, mainly because we are living in an oculocentric world, where vision is our principal way of perceiving.

Without view, just leaving our hands to look out for the clues, in the very beginning of the course, we disabled the sense of sight to approximate each other only by touch, pressure, caress, handle and palpate. *Touch produces different sensory information to that provided by the eye... it's not just reactive but also active* (Sherrington, C. 1906 *The Integrative Action of the Nervous System*, en Sennet, 2009; 189).



We set this new circumstance in order to shorten the distance between sight and the "seen", and of perception itself, claiming knowledge as an experiencing rather than only looking or just thinking (both detached/distant approaches to perception). By this way we took under concern other facts

of recognition such as weight, softness, warmth and movement that usually are not relevant at a first contact, and we considered hands as the basic instrument for exploring the unknown, avoiding prejudices coming from visual data such as our specific way of dressing, age, gender, social role or ethnic group. We wanted to make the students be aware of the perception inputs linked to ideology but also make them concerned about unusual facts such as voice, tone and speech fluency, registered by other senses like hearing or even the smell as the most primitive sense that provokes most durable memories. This action introduced different viewpoints of approachment and made a statement for the experimental character of the workshop's further experiences.

In fact, when students were finally able to see who they were with and how the space of the class was, they "lost their voice". **Without voice, our hands draw signs in the air.** Participants introduced themselves in a video only by using their hands. By watching the videos we realized the difficulty of exploring the freedom of hands because our imaginary sign language is still ruled by stereotypes. Most of the participants reproduced image symbols with their fingers rather than expressed emotions with gestures. For example in order to say "I like it" they picked up their thumb, or formed a heart. Most of them used their whole body to show actions like cycling, or skiing. Generally, we managed to understand what they were trying to say, and we observed that a lot of hand-gestures are common in all countries. Although we all speak different languages "*The hand is the only speech that is natural to man... which, without teaching, man in all regions of the habitable world does at the sight most easily understand.*" (Bulwer John, *Chironomia*, 1644 en Donald Mac 1975; 1)



Without seeing, without voice, without hearing, little by little we went on removing our information layers until we managed to lose our memory. We were left "without prejudices" and "without restricting thoughts" having achieved a first approach on our defamiliarization process.

Then, we wrote a list of all those dispersed variables that describes hands in order to find out **what a hand is**: Which are the limits that define it? A hand with: five, four, three, two, one finger. A hand with no fingers. When hands are not linked with brain, far from desires and projects, they change into images – kind of representations of our sensations, emotions, wills, actions, passions and motives –. And through multiple associations of images, we could discover unknown variables that could be joined in new categories, in an attempt to make a cartography of hands, an exhaustive taxonomy inspired from the method carried out by Aby Warburg (2010). There on a blackboard of 10m long, we discovered our hands.



Meanwhile, in our “in-betweens” when we weren’t manipulating anything, we were knitting as an action that joined together all workshops’ activities. We learned how to knit the first day and like our ancestors we were unceasingly fabricating textiles in different colors and shapes, **without thinking, just leaving our hands to move, repeat and produce.**



"To repeat again and again an action is stimulating when it is organized looking ahead. The substantial thing of the routine can change, transform and improve, but the emotional compensation lies in the personal experience to repeat. This experience is nothing strange, we all know it: is rhythm. Already present in the human heart contractions, the artisan has extended it to his hands and eyes." (Sennet, 2009; 216,217)

And then, ready to go beyond limits, we went to Prado Museum to look for “monster hands”. The term monster hand was the metaphor used to describe the hands which, physically or representatively, extend or lose their limits. The challenge was to convert the visit to a classical museum in an estrangement experience by “the monster hands hunting”. Velazquez, El Greco, Goya, Ribera among many other painters offered us a large collection of hands that could be considered as monster hands. They revealed us that hands are deformed when feelings, pain, madness and utility is more important than their image, like in life. The best interpretation about monster hands came from a girl of the group who after seeing the dim hand of the painter in “Las Meninas” she observed that it was impossible to distinct his hand from the paint brush, they were like one. Definitely for Velazquez his hand was his paintbrush, his life was painting.

And now **without boundaries, we just left our hands to move, manipulate and extend their limits** until they were transformed into “monsters”. Making monster hands liberates people from the need to make a “perfect” hand, similar to a real one. The variety of hand production was impressive and we were all surprised by our small creations that were far more interesting than some of the references showed during the session. A hand that was a whistle; two hands pasted together; a box-hand; a long-nail hand. Daniel Miller’s words from his introduction to the exhibition *“the power of making”* (A&V Museum, London) seemed the best reference: *“Feel for yourself that sense of achievement and exhilaration when you see in front of you the finished object of your labor, and how that object has in turn made you more than you otherwise had been.”* (Miller, 2011; 15).



While the construction of the monster hands was taking place, a conference and dialogue about the monster hands of comics and cinema was carried out. Several movies opened a discussion about the relationship between hands and mind like “The Thing of The Addams Family”, The Hand, The beast with the five fingers and more. “Edward Scissorhands”, X-men, and the hands of “Superheroes” gave space to speak about how the anatomy of the hand has been an inspiration to movie directors.

We couldn’t go on knitting with such monster hands, so we started moving them. **Perform without thinking, just leaving our hands to act independently.** We had to make a dialogue in groups of three just using our hands. We started from an introduction to Sign language and *its unique linguistic use of space... that is amazingly complex, for much of what occurs linearly, sequentially temporally in speech becomes simultaneous, concurrent, multileveled in Sign* (Sacks, 1990; 88). However, most of the participants inserted mimetic and theatrical elements in their narrations. Hands were aptly used in cases but in others it was difficult to recognize their intention, lost in the amount of movements. This caused a difficulty in communication that had as a result a lack of interaction after the presentations. However, in the preparation of the exercise people did interacted a lot within their teams working with interest in the creative part of the exercise.

Later we were taught the basis of **flamenco dance**; like all parts of human body, hands are an articulated extremity of expression that explores and helps to be located in space, find references and discover the body axis in balance. Hands in flamenco break the harmony and balance of the lines that arms create. Flamenco hands moves inward and outward, transmitting strength, freedom and allowing improvisation; hands are mysterious and reflect the most intimate and intense human feelings. Variants according to the different origins, places or interpreters, gives at flamenco styles not only richness but a proper character which is reflected in the expression of hands. In the “soleá” they are dramatic, in “tangos” are festive in “bulería” are spontaneous, in “farruca” are brave and in “seguiriya” are tragic. The meaning of the hands in flamenco is linked to each of those styles as part of the ritual of a collective participation accompanied by singing, dancing, guitar and percussion, whose common denominator is the rhythm.



You can get 700.000 different positions; using combinations of arms, the wrists and fingers (Davis, 1998) depending on the cultural, natural, social, familiar or personal experience, these positions will have different meanings, allowing multiple options for hands action in dance. To explain the great flexibility, mobility and expressiveness of hands several studies come to the conclusion that the human brain cortical fields for hands and fingers are much more extensive and differentiated than those corresponding to other segments of the body members. They are ten times more important than this were feet are involved (Schinca, 1988).

It’s interesting to observe the transformation that the previous dialogues in sign language suffered by introducing flamenco elements. The participants’ body attitude turned out to be more relaxed, open and spontaneous than it was before. Their facial expression showed what was also confirmed verbally; they were confident and satisfied. We spent this night in a flamenco spectacle,

where all participants were really impressed by the flamenco dance and music.



Next morning we learnt how to play the castanets. **Music, made hands to move by their own.** Introduce castanets in a ludic way motivated the group and worked as a cohesive element. Participants did collaborate in space and time and managed to keep the rhythm and the “compas” of “seguriya” at once.

Just an amazing collective sound emerged as hands drew shapes freely in the air looking for personal expressive movements. The learning intensity was increasing and the course temperature was out of control allowing an “unpredictable” to happen: One of the students showed us some movements coming from Japanese martial art Ninjutsu that involve hands as an instrument. Like a magician in the forest, he made us to leave our barriers apart, and body contact worked as a significant catalyst that led to reset time and space, establishing an unexpected **relationship among hands and bodies** and bodies between them.



And from that typical beauty of castanets' Spanish sound, we passed through handy sound to a new peculiar task consisting in producing a new mobile's ringtone, mainly made with hands, but emphasizing the need of coordination and collaboration of the team members in more than a sensory level. The participants worked together not only in the interpretation of the new sound but also in the production and experimentation of it. This process alerted senses like hearing and kinaesthetic, often forgotten in the academic environment.

The last day the participants made a video in the city of Madrid. The video should take place in the metro, in a mall, in a square, in a Chinese shop, in a Spanish bar, in a public toilet, in a cinema etc. Participants, in teams of four, should interact with people in the streets without speaking since their hands were the protagonists. This last exercise resulted extraordinarily motivating. All of them were implicated in a both sentimental and ludic way. They experimented with most of the “concepts” introduced along the workshop like knitting, castanets, sign language or monster hands. Their major surprise, and of ours as well, was the effect that communication and interaction with everyday people in the streets, metro, bars and shops, can have in the intensity of our emotions and perception of the city and of life.

Conclusion

Definitely, we deeply experienced the city, art and life like a playground where we left our hands to

guide us. As real “supporters” of Arendt's philosophy, we perceived action as the only possibility for something new and inedited to appear in our world: any action triggers other action (Barcena, 2006; 194). While acting we were not aware of what we were doing; we first acted and then, we reflected on our action and its outcomes. In this playground, by closing the course, we made with all of our knitting textiles a scarf; an overall metaphor for the whole course that looked like an artwork. An educational project of **collaborating hands** where the resemblance of the Dadaist “**exquisite corpse**”, is seen as a different way of learning through a collective consciousness of a sense of diversity, empathy and synergy.



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